

Round-Table Discussion Record Note

Woodland management policy; should UK woodlands be managed for amenity value or commercial production?

Held at The Royal Show, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, 4th July, 2008
The Foundation is very grateful to the Royal Agricultural Society of England for their help in jointly organising this round-table discussion.

Chair: The Earl of Selborne KBE FRS, Chairman, The Foundation for Science and Technology

Speakers: Paul Hill-Tout, Director England, Forestry Commission
Dr Nick Brown, Department of Plant Sciences, Oxford University
Sir Jack Whitaker Bt, Tiln Farms and former Treasurer, Royal Forestry Society

MR. HILL-TOUT did not believe that there was a conflict between woodland management for amenity value and commercial production. It was possible to capture both through sustainable management. But such management must be pursued in engagement with woodland owners, the workforce and the local society who should be involved both agreeing the aims and methods. The Forestry and Woodlands policy aimed to be comprehensive and the Forestry Commission was working to develop means to connect the various parties. While long term objectives should be both social and environmental, they were best realized through economic success.

DR. BROWN agreed - there were no necessary conflicts between amenity, social and commercial objectives. But management was crucial - 75% of woodland in parts of England, particularly in Yorkshire, were not managed at all; and only about 1/7th of the timber in England was harvested. The rest went to waste. Failure to manage led not only to commercial failure, but also to loss of amenity and diversity. It is possible a golden age for forestry might be dawning with increased demand, leading to higher prices (a 40% recent increase), an effective transport network, and science based innovation. Only if this opportunity is grasped will the 21st century challenges in urban life, climate change and product shortage be met. But more research and an expansion of professional skills was essential.

SIR JACK WHITAKER said he managed the 500 hectares of woodland he owned for many different purposes. Woodland had a spiritual and aesthetic impact on people, which should be emphasized. It was also vital for extracting CO₂ from the atmosphere and flood management. It supported a wide range of recreations ranging from fox hunting to paintball. Research was essential to understand the impact of climate change, the spread and impact of diseases of trees and to develop new or improved tree varieties which would withstand new stresses. There needed to be a strong delivery mechanism, lead by the Forestry Commission.

The following points were made in discussion:

1. We must start from where we are with a basically 19th century structure of woodlands in both size and nature of plot and types of tree. Regionally the patterns were very

diverse. Radical restructuring would take time and would need to be sensitive to this underlying structure. But it could be done with strong leadership and an understanding of the diverse motivations of owners.

2. Particularly in the South-East there were signs of improving and recovering management in woodlands. Significantly, planners no longer looked at woodlands simply as commercial forests, but understood, and tried to enhance, their environmental and recreational value.

3. While many speakers agreed that the lack of management of woodlands was of great concern, other struck a note of caution - not all woodlands could serve commercial ends; lack of management might improve environmental use and encourage biodiversity. This view was challenged - lack of management lead to less biodiversity in fauna and flora as well as trees. But if management meant intervention, then it should be clear that the need for intervention had been identified.

4. Scotland was different both in the nature and importance of its woodlands and government structure. Devolution had enabled it to develop and deliver better policies based on the particular circumstances in different places. Overall policies, whether in Scotland or elsewhere needed to be disaggregated to meet specific needs.

5. It was a great advance that we had a trees, woods and forestry policy, not just one for forestry, which ranged from trees in urban areas, the small woodlands in South East England, basically needed for recreation and amenity, to the commercial scale forests of the North East. Inevitably, at this stage, the policy was very high level, but would as it developed, respond to different needs. Recreational use had now been recognized as having an economic value, and keeping woods in good heart was a crucial sustainable activity.

6. Management must be carefully defined. It meant working with the grain of the land and trees for long term benefit, not short term gains. Management needed to understand the different forms of cropping - felling, coppicing - and their different timescales.

7. Woodland owners must have incentives to preserve and manage. Prohibition and regulation often lead to apathy

and inaction. Incentives were needed to help to understand marketing initiatives, developing subsidiary enterprises, as did the National Trust and the increase in value that could accrue to surrounding asset. The public would respond enthusiastically to schemes which promoted woodland activities (e.g. demonstrations of logging techniques in Wytham Woods near Oxford). But there was a cost to promoting access and recreation, which many private owners could not meet.

8. It was the value of the product that created the revenue stream from wood, and it was crucial that owners and others understood and used the market. Previous policies had been dominated by supply side consideration - grants etc. - but the emphasis should now be put on increasing demand and raising price.

9. It would be valuable to use a social science model which aimed at finding out what people wanted from woodlands, and then considered the policies which might meet them. Such research activity was already being undertaken at Oxford on what were the most pressing questions for forestry, and is research being concentrated on them. Participants were urged to find more about the project on www.forestryevidence.org.

10. The Commission should undertake a study which looked at the benefits of all woodlands, private and public, to the public in terms not only of environment and pleasure, but also in terms of health and widening opportunities. The relationship to carbon reduction should also be factored in (not easy - the benefit might be limited to reducing the use of more carbon producing substances such as concrete). It should emphasize the need for collaboration and cooperation across the sector

11. It was clear that woodland policies could be of importance in both mitigation and adaptation in relation to climate change. But climate change issues were global and UK woodland policies should have both an EU and a global dimension.

Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield KCB

Useful web references:

Abbey Forestry:

www.abbeyforestry.co.uk

Chilterns Woodland Project:

www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/woodlands_project.html

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – A strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests:

www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/rddteam/pdf/0706forestry-strategy.pdf

Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford:

www.plants.ox.ac.uk

The Forestry Commission:

www.forestry.gov.uk

Oxford Forestry Institute:

www.plants.ox.ac.uk/offi/

Royal Agricultural Society of England

www.rase.org.uk

Royal Forestry Society:

www.rfs.org.uk

Top Ten Questions for Forestry:

www.forestryevidence.org

The Woodland Trust:

www.woodland-trust.org.uk

Attendees:

Mr David Blakeway Smith

Chairman, Worcester Division, Royal Forestry Society

Dr Nick Brown

Lecturer in Forestry, Department of Plant Sciences, Oxford University

Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield KCB

Council Member, The Foundation for Science and Technology

Ms Sophie Churchill

Chief Executive, The National Forest Company

Mr Michael Clark

Chairman, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)

Mr Simon Frere-Cook MBE

Director, Royal Show and Technical Events, Royal Agricultural Society of England (not present but organiser)

Mr Crispin Golding

Woodland Investment Adviser, Anglia and Chilterns District, UPM Tilhill

Dr Dougal Goodman FREng

Chief Executive, The Foundation for Science and Technology

Ms Lucy Goodman

Applied Ecology and Conservation, University of East Anglia

Dr Gabriel Hemery

Chief Executive, Sylva Foundation

Mr Paul Hill-Tout

Director, England, Forestry Commission

Dr John Jackson

Chief Executive, Royal Forestry Society

Mr Nigel Lowthrop

Founder, Hill Holt Wood

Mr George McRobbie

Operations Director and Health and Safety Director, UPM Tilhill

Dr Dominic Mellor

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Glasgow

Mr John Morris

Director, Chiltern Woodlands Project

Ms Gill Petrokofsky

Department of Plant Sciences, Oxford University

Mr Nick Phillips

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Dr John Powell

Countryside and Community Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire

Mr William Price

Savills

Mr Robert Rickman

The Earl of Selborne KBE FRS

Chairman, The Foundation for Science and Technology

Mr Tim Smalley

Bedmax

Mr Norman Starks

Woodland Operations Director UK, The Woodland Trust

Mr Philip J Stewart

Formerly Oxford Forestry Institute

Mr Graham Taylor

Confederation of Forest Industries

Sir Jack Whitaker Bt

Tiln Farms and former Treasurer, Royal Forestry Society

Dr William Wolmer

Blackmoor Estate

Mr Andrew Woods

Chairman, Royal Forestry Society Management Committee and Abbey Forestry